

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BUENOS AIRES 6564

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDIP, AR
SUBJECT: VIDELA VISIT: VIDELA'S POSITION ON THE
EVE OF HIS US VISIT

1. SUMMARY. AS THINGS HAVE TURNED OUT
VIDELA'S FORTHCOMING VISIT TO WASHINGTON
IS BEING FAVORABLY VIEWED BY THE PRESS
AND GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS WITH WHOM WE
HAVE TALKED. HE NEEDED THIS BOOST.
VIDELA HAS BEEN UNDER FIRE FOR "BEING
TOO NICE TO THE AMERICANS"--THE SEVERAL
VISITORS WE HAD HERE DURING AUGUST WHO
WERE INDEED TREATED WITH GREAT HOSPITALITY.
THIS CARPING, WE THINK, PLUS THE HARD
REALITIES OF US ARMS TRANSFER POLICIES
AND LEGISLATION LED VIDELA ONLY FIVE DAYS
BEFORE HIS DEPARTURE TO AGREE TO
ARGENTINA'S CANCELLING OUT OF THE UNITAS
NAVAL EXERCISE. VIDELA STILL FACES HARD
LINE DOMESTIC CRITICS. WE NEED TO UNDERSTAND THIS AND
HAVE CONCERN FOR THIS AS WE LOOK TOWARD HIS WASHINGTON
VISIT. END SUMMARY

2. PRESIDENT VIDELA'S TRIP TO WASHINGTON AND HIS
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CONVERSATIONS WITH CARTER ARE GENERALLY BEING FAVORABLY
COMMENTED UPON BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS AND THE MEDIA.
THE THEME IS THAT ALTHOUGH PRESIDENT CARTER WILL SEE
ALL THE VISITING HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT HIS TALKS
WITH VIDELA HAVE SPECIAL SIGNIFICANCE. COMMENTATORS
OBSERVE THAT BILATERAL RELATIONS HAVE BEEN STRAINED,
BUT THAT AS A RESULT OF THE SEVERAL US GROUPS THAT

HAVE VISITED HERE DURING AUGUST--DERIAN, TODMAN, CODEL YATRON AND CODEL HOLLINGS--OUR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING HAS CONSIDERABLY ADVANCED. VIDELA'S TRIP IS VIEWED AS A KIND OF CULMINATION OF THIS IMPROVEMENT PROCESS.

3. THIS OPTIMISM CONTRASTS MARKEDLY WITH NUMEROUS NEGATIVE POINTS OF VIEW EXPRESSED EARLIER ON THE GENERAL SUBJECT OF VIDELA'S HANDLING OF RELATIONS WITH THE US. A SMALL BUT IMPORTANT MILITARY AND POLITICAL MINORITY PROFESSED TO SEE THE CHAIN OF VISITORS AS US INTERFERENCE. THIS MINORITY CHARACTERIZED RECENT US VISITORS TO ARGENTINA AS "INSPECTORS," COME TO DETERMINE HOW BAD THINGS ARE HERE. THERE WAS SHARP IN-HOUSE OPPOSITION AMONG SOME RANKING MEMBERS OF THE MILITARY TO PRESIDENT VIDELA'S HOSPITABLE RECEPTION OF THESE VISITORS, AND OPPOSITION TO HOSPITALITY THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND CERTAIN CABINET OFFICERS ALSO SHOWED.

4. WE ARE CERTAIN THAT THE RECEPTION GIVEN OUR VISITORS WAS THE RESULT OF A SPECIFIC AND DELIBERATE POLICY DECISION BY VIDELA, AND THAT HIS DECISION ENTAILED POLITICAL RISKS FOR THE PRESIDENT. AT STAKE WAS NATIONALISM AND PRIDE, OF THE KIND WHICH CAUSED VIDELA'S WASHINGTON TRIP TO BE PRESENTED INITIALLY AS ONLY RESULTING FROM HIS O.A.S. INVITATION AND PRESIDENT TORRIJOS' URGING--EVEN AS THE SAME NEWSPAPERS

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WENT ON IN THE SAME ARTICLES TO SPEAK OF IMPORTANT BILATERAL IMPROVEMENTS BOUND TO ACCRUE.

5. LINKED ALSO WITH THESE INTERNAL POLITICS WAS THE PRESSING NEED TO DECIDE WHETHER ARGENTINA SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE UNITAS XVIII NAVAL EXERCISES, AND TO GIVE A DECISION ON THIS BEFORE VIDELA'S DEPARTURE FOR THE US. (SEE BUENOS AIRES 6512). GIVEN THE DIFFICULTIES VIDELA ALREADY FACED AND HIS NEED TO ENGAGE HIS OWN PRESTIGE WITH "ARGENTINE PRIDE" IN EXPRESSING DISPLEASURE OVER US ARMS POLICY AND ARMS LEGISLATION, ARGENTINA'S DECISION TO BACK AWAY FROM UNITAS APPEARS A POLITICAL IMPERATIVE. VIDELA'S VISIT TO WASHINGTON WILL SUBJECT HIM TO CRITICISM AT A DIFFICULT MOMENT OF HIS ADMINISTRATION. ANY OFFICIAL CRITICISM OF VIDELA IN THE US AT THIS JUNCTURE WILL ONLY HELP HIS POLITICAL ENEMIES IN THE MILITARY.

6. A SERIOUS WEAKENING OF VIDELA COULD HAVE UNFORTUNATE CONSEQUENCES BOTH FOR ARGENTINA AND THE FUTURE OF OUR BILATERAL RELATIONS. WE DO NOT SUGGEST THAT WE BACK

PEDAL ON OUR HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS, NOR THAT WE OVERLOOK
THE HUMAN RIGHTS VIOLATIONS THAT TAKE PLACE HERE. WHAT
WE HOPE THAT VIDELA CAN BE PLEDGED IS OUR CONTINUING
WILLINGNESS TO AKE INTO ACCOUNT--IN TANGIBLE WAYS--
THE ARGENTINE GOVERNMENT'S OWN EFFORTS TO GAIN HUMANE
CONTROL OVER THE NATION AND ITS EFFORTS TO CREATE FROM
A TRAGIC RECENT PAST A STABLE, WORKABLE, RESPONSIVE
POLITICAL ARRANGEMENT.
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